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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of a high ability suburban school district on the personal development of adolescents with average mental ability who had always lived in the community and attended its schools. Two groups were identified to determine the influence of academic and intellectual competition on personal development. An "average ability" group that was average on the national norms of the School and College Ability Test was compared to a "higher ability" group that was average on the suburban district's own norms. Correlation coefficients were computed between measures of personality development which consisted of the Capacity for Status, Self-Acceptance, Socialability, Achievement via Conformance, and Intellectual Efficiency scales of the California Psychological Inventory and level of intellectual ability to determine if level of ability rather than peer competition was influencing personality development. Results indicate that a lifetime of educational competition with highly intelligent peers more adversely affects the personal development of average ability females than males. (Author/HMV)

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The Personal Development of Adolescents with Average Intellectual Ability in a High Ability Suburban School District

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Peer influences on personality development and behavior is probably second in importance to that of parents. As reinforcers of certain behavior, as models of imitation and identification, as a group pressuring the adolescent to modify his behavior, the adolescent's peers are agents of socialization. Peers, parents, siblings, and teachers, are significant others that influence the adolescent's concept of himself. Frustration at school can lead to feelings of inadequacy, which in turn can lead to lower performance that might otherwise be higher.

To examine the relative influence of intellectual differences and peer competition in academic achievement, this study examined the impact of a high ability suburban school district on the personal development of adolescents with average mental ability who had lived in the community and attended its schools all their lives. There was strong pressure for high school graduates to attend a four year college or university in this middle and upper-middle class suburb of a large midwestern city. Intelligence was well above the national average. A group intelligence test mean for 9th graders was 116 with a standard deviation of 12.

Two groups were identified to determine the influence of academic and intellectual competition on personal development. An "average ability" group that was average on the national norms of the School and College Ability Test was compared to a "higher ability" group that was average on the suburban district's own norms. The "average ability" group mean was a converted score of 277 with a standard deviation of

3.38. The "higher ability" group had a mean converted score of 290 and a standard deviation of 2.57. Both groups had scores that ranged from one-third standard deviation below their respective means to one-third standard deviation above the mean. Correlation coefficients were computed between measures of personality development which consisted of the Capacity for Status, Self-Acceptance, Sociability, Achievement via Conformance, and Intellectual Efficiency scales of the California Psychological Inventory and level of intellectual ability to determine if level of ability rather than peer competition was influencing personality development. Tables 1 and 2 present the correlations.

TABLE 1

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN CPI SCALES AND SCAT TOTAL FOR HIGHER ABILITY MALE, FEMALE, AND COMBINED GROUPS

CPI Scales	SCAT Total		
	Male N 26	Female N 23	Combined N 49
Capacity for Status	.44 *	.34 n.s.	.30 *
Self-acceptance	.16 n.s.	.34 n.s.	.21 n.s.
Sense of Well-being	.21 n.s.	.16 n.s.	.19 n.s.
Achievement via conformance	.18 n.s.	.14 n.s.	.10 n.s.
Intellectual Efficiency	.26 n.s.	.23 n.s.	.16 n.s.

* Significant at the .05 level.

Only one personality characteristic is positively related to intellectual ability, and that is Capacity for Status for the male, "higher ability" group.

TABLE 2

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN CPI SCALES AND SCAT TOTAL FOR LOWER ABILITY MALE, FEMALE, AND COMBINED GROUPS

CPI Scales	SCAT Total		
	Male N 26	Female N 23	Combined N 49
Capacity for Status	-.34 n.s.	.23 n.s.	-.04 n.s.
Self-acceptance	-.39 *	.14 n.s.	-.16 n.s.
Sense of Well-being	.29 n.s.	.01 n.s.	.13 n.s.
Achievement via conformance	-.09 n.s.	.22 n.s.	.05 n.s.
Intellectual efficiency	.06 n.s.	.02 n.s.	.04 n.s.

* Significant at the .05 level.

Only one significant relationship is shown between personality characteristics and scholastic aptitude for the lower ability group. Self-acceptance correlates -.39 with ability for the lower ability male group. Table 2 presents this data.

Subjects were adolescents in the ninth grade who had attended schools in the district for all of their education. This constraint insured that all subjects experienced the same educational environment throughout their school careers. Of the 152 students (73 males and 79 females) who met the criteria of average mental ability, 26 males and 23 females attended the district schools for all of their academic careers. Of the 324 students (151 males and 173 females) who met the criteria for the comparison group, 50 males and 74 females had attended all nine years.

Comparisons between the two groups were made by sex using a two tailed "t" test with a significance level of .05.

TABLE 3

DIFFERENCES AMONG LOWER AND HIGHER ABILITY STUDENTS IN MALE, FEMALE, AND COMBINED GROUPS WITH RESPECT TO CAPACITY FOR STATUS

Higher Ability Group			Lower Ability Group				
	N	Mean		N	Mean	D	t
Male	26	40.42	Male	26	36.50	3.92	1.73 n.s.
Female	23	43.47	Female	23	34.73	8.74	2.78 **
Combined	49	41.85	Combined	49	35.67	6.18	4.90 ***

** Significant beyond the .01 level.
*** Significant beyond the .001 level.

TABLE 4

DIFFERENCES AMONG LOWER AND HIGHER ABILITY STUDENTS IN MALE, FEMALE, AND COMBINED GROUPS WITH RESPECT TO SELF-ACCEPTANCE

Higher Ability Group			Lower Ability Group				
	N	Mean		N	Mean	D	t
Male	26	50.26	Male	26	45.19	5.07	1.65 n.s.
Female	23	50.39	Female	23	44.26	6.13	2.27 *
Combined	49	50.32	Combined	49	44.75	5.57	2.73 **

* Significant at the .05 level.
** Significant at the .01 level.

TABLE 5

DIFFERENCES AMONG LOWER AND HIGHER ABILITY STUDENTS IN MALE, FEMALE, AND COMBINED GROUPS WITH RESPECT TO SENSE OF WELL-BEING

Higher Ability Group			Lower Ability Group				
	N	Mean		N	Mean	D	t
Male	26	22.11	Male	26	17.34	4.77	1.52 n.s.
Female	23	21.34	Female	23	16.36	5.08	1.78 n.s.
Combined	49	21.75	Combined	49	16.83	4.92	2.35 *

* Significant beyond the .05 level.

TABLE 6

DIFFERENCES AMONG LOWER AND HIGHER ABILITY STUDENTS IN MALE, FEMALE, AND COMBINED GROUPS WITH RESPECT TO SOCIABILITY

Higher Ability Group			Lower Ability Group				
	N	Mean		N	Mean	D	t
Male	26	46.84	Male	26	45.00	1.84	0.62 n.s.
Female	23	50.39	Female	23	44.82	5.57	2.19 *
Combined	49	48.51	Combined	49	44.91	7.60	3.93 ***

* Significant at the .05 level.
*** Significant at the .001 level.

TABLE 7

DIFFERENCES AMONG LOWER AND HIGHER ABILITY STUDENTS IN MALE, FEMALE, AND COMBINED GROUPS WITH RESPECT TO ACHIEVEMENT VIA CONFORMANCE

Higher Ability Group			Lower Ability Group				
	N	Mean		N	Mean	D	t
Male	26	34.65	Male	26	29.23	5.42	1.97 n.s.
Female	23	37.34	Female	23	28.13	9.21	3.01 **
Combined	49	35.91	Combined	49	28.71	7.20	3.58 ***

** Significant beyond the .01 level.
*** Significant beyond the .001 level.

TABLE 8

DIFFERENCES AMONG LOWER AND HIGHER ABILITY STUDENTS IN MALE, FEMALE, AND COMBINED GROUPS WITH RESPECT TO INTELLECTUAL EFFICIENCY

Higher Ability Group			Lower Ability Group				
	N	Mean		N	Mean	D	t
Male	26	25.42	Male	26	19.50	5.92	2.54 **
Female	23	28.43	Female	23	18.39	10.04	4.89 ***
Combined	49	26.83	Combined	49	18.97	7.86	5.07 ***

** Significant beyond the .02 level.
*** Significant beyond the .001 level.

Discussion

A lifetime of educational competition with highly intelligent peers affects the personal development of average ability females more adversely than males. They reported themselves on the CPI, whose scores were not related to level of mental ability, to be significantly lower in their Capacity for Status, Self-Acceptance, Socialability, Achievement via Conformance and Intellectual Efficiency when compared to the Higher Ability group. Males were lower on only one CPI scale, Intellectual Efficiency. In terms of interpersonal psychology the average ability females tend to be more apathetic, shy, awkward, self blaming, cautious, and conventional than the comparison group. As for achievement potential they tend to be more stubborn and insecure. On the intellectual efficiency scale both females and males tend to be more defensive, shallow, unambitious, and lacking in self-direction and self discipline than the comparison group. Only the females had significantly lower attitudes toward school which indicates a lower level of self assurance about academic activities and a lack of desire to do school work.

These findings of poorer personal adjustment of females suggests that such factors as rigorous competition with peers of higher ability, failure to meet parential demands for higher grades, and failure to meet teacher and group standards do lead to a lowering of one's self concept and feelings of inadequacy. The fact females but not males reported greater psychological distress because of peer competition can be partially explained by studie by Getzels and Jackson (1959) who found dissatisfied adolescent girls are more intropunitive, that is, blaming themselves for their dissatisfaction, while boys are more extrapunitive, that is, critical and blaming others for their feelings of dissatisfaction.

The implications of these findings for suburban schools are that more resources should be put in the counseling and guidance at an early age for average ability students to help them understand and accept themselves and to encourage teachers to evaluate students' performance using individual growth standards rather than group standards.

Reference

Jackson, Philip W. and Getzels, Jacob W. Psychological Health and Classroom Functioning: A Study of Dissatisfaction with School among Adolescents. Journal of Educational Psychology, 1959, 50, 295-300.